Abed Azzam*

‘Blot Out the Memory of Amalek from Under Heaven’: The Gaza Genocide and the Political Theological Legacy of the Biblical Amalek

https://doi.org/10.1515/auk-2025-2018

Abstract: The biblical command ‘Blot out the memory of Amalek’ surfaced heavily in Israel after October 7, 2023. UN institutions, international and Israeli human rights NGOs and scholars of genocide studies classified the wide use of the Amalek rhetoric across Israeli politics and the military as a clear incitement to genocide. It is acknowledged that such scientific and legal subordination of the present Israeli Amalek rhetoric to the concept of genocide is indispensably important for the Palestinian just cause. However, this paper further singles out this rhetoric to examine it through the analytical lens of political theology. Thus, it first highlights the political-theological carriage of the biblical narrations of Amalek. Second, it situates Amalek as an archetype of Carl Schmitt’s concept of the enemy. Third, the paper traces a genealogy of the Zionist construction of the Palestinian as an Amalekite enemy. Finally, it concludes by showing how this political-theological genealogy culminates in the erasure of the Palestinian from the memory of Western ‘civilization.’

Keywords: Amalek; enemy; political theology; Zionism; Gaza genocide

> To the Israelis, whose incomparable military and political power dominates us, we are the periphery, the image that will not go away. Every assertion of our non-existence, every attempt to spirit us away, every new effort to prove that we were never really there, simply raises the question of why so much denial of, and such energy expended on, what was not there? (Said 1999, 41–2)

***Corresponding author: Abed Azzam**, Independent Writer, Berlin, Germany,
E-mail: azzamabed@hotmail.com

1 Amalek Appears (Again)

Three weeks after October 7, 2023, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu invoked the biblical command to annihilate Amalek while urging his soldiers to attack Gaza: "Remember what Amalek did to you." (Deut. 25:17) (Netanyahu 2023a, 2023b, para. 4)

1.1 The Use of Amalek Rhetoric in Israeli Politics, Culture, and Society after October 7, 2023

Netanyahu's statement was not an isolated incident. Following October 2023, Israeli political and military leaders frequently employed dehumanizing and genocidal rhetoric against Palestinians in Gaza. Defence Minister Yoav Gallant described Gazans as "human animals," while President Isaac Herzog declared, "it's an entire nation out there that is responsible. It is not true, this rhetoric about civilians who were not aware and not involved. It is absolutely not true." Military commanders also used inflammatory language, as one vowed to turn Gaza into a "slaughterhouse" (European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights 2024). Nissim Vaturi, member of the Israeli Parliament, sated repeatedly "wipe Gaza off the face of the earth," and "Gaza must be burned." (El País 2024) In another two occasions, that genocide scholars identify as explicit incitement to violence, Israeli soldiers in uniform have been filmed on 5 December 2023 dancing, chanting and singing "May their village burn, May Gaza be erased"; and, two days later, on a separate occasion inside Gaza on 7 December 2023, soldiers, dancing, singing and chanting, sang "we know our motto: there are no uninvolved civilians" and "to wipe off the seed of Amalek." (International Court of Justice 2023, 152) Additionally, Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu controversially suggested that nuclear strikes on Gaza were among Israel's strategic options (Eliyahu 2023).

This rhetoric extended beyond political and military leaders, permeating broader Israeli society. A June 2025 survey conducted by Hebrew University's Chord Center revealed that approximately 64 % of Israelis agreed with the statement, "[t]here are no innocents in Gaza" (Chord Center, Hebrew University of Jerusalem 2025). Cultural expressions also reflected this normalization of violence. For example, the song 'Zeh Aleinu' ('This Is On Us') gained viral popularity with lyrics such as 'Gaza is a graveyard,' while another anthem, 'Harbu Darbu' ('They Got Bombed'), mocking Palestinian deaths, was widely circulated among soldiers. Even children were drawn into this rhetoric: one Purim play featured kindergarteners dressed as soldiers chanting, "We Will Annihilate Everyone" (Dawn 2024). Scholars of genocide argue – as I will detail here below – that these political, military,

and cultural expressions collectively contribute to a climate of impunity, widely recognized as a precursor to atrocity crimes (Goldberg 2025, 14).

1.2 Responses by the UN and Human Rights NGOs

The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women described rhetoric from Netanyahu and other Israeli officials as "hallmark of the genocide in Gaza" (UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women 2025). Multiple reports from UN agencies and human rights organizations documented how this rhetoric facilitated mass violence and violations of international humanitarian law. Amnesty International claimed that the statements made by Netanyahu, Minister of Defense Gallant, other government ministers and high-ranking military officers "appeared to call for, or justify, genocidal acts (Amnesty International 2024). Human Rights Watch (HRW) described military directives treating Gaza as a "slaughterhouse" as consistent with crimes of apartheid and persecution. B'Tselem mentions statements by Israeli high-ranking officials that a "central objective of the war" was ethnic cleansing (B'Tselem 2025), while Gisha, another Israeli NGO, called the situation in Gaza a "slaughter" and unjustified "cruelty" that "must stop" (Gisha 2025).

1.3 The Genocide Case at the ICJ

These statements and actions formed the foundation of South Africa's landmark case against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), titled "Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip" (ICJ, South Africa v. Israel 2023). Netanyahu's invocation of Amalek was explicitly cited as direct incitement to genocide. Also, South Africa's submission included, among other statements, Gallant's above mentioned dehumanizing comments and Herzog's genocide inciting statement as "clear direct and public incitement to genocide" that give evidence of genocidal intent under Article II(c) of the Genocide Convention (ICJ, South Africa v. Israel 2023, 142–52). Additionally, directives to create a 'slaughterhouse' environment were presented as evidence of Israel's systematic efforts to destroy a population (ICJ, South Africa v. Israel 2023, 156). On January 26, 2024, the ICJ issued a provisional measures order recognizing a 'plausible risk' of genocide and mandating Israel to halt incitement and ensure humanitarian access (ICJ, South Africa v. Israel 2024).

1.4 Scholarly Affirmations of Genocide

Although the ICJ has not yet issued its final ruling, a broad scholarly consensus holds that Israel's actions satisfy the legal criteria for genocide. Genocide scholar

Raz Segal has characterized the situation as a 'textbook case of genocide,' citing the systematic destruction of Gaza's infrastructure and mass displacement as evidence (Segal 2023). Holocaust historian Omer Bartov similarly emphasized "My inescapable conclusion has become that Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinian people" (Bartov 2025). William Schabas a Canadian academic specialising in international criminal and human rights law, claimed that there is as a "strong case that Israel's response constitutes the crime of genocide" (Schabas 2024).

The reports of leading international human rights organization that include Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, confirm that Israel is conducting a genocide against the Palestinian people (Amnesty International 2024; Human Rights Watch. 2024). Also, the Israeli NGOs B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel have likewise arrived at the same conclusion in 2025 (B'Tselem 2025; Physicians for Human Rights Israel 2025). Likewise, prominent Israeli Holocaust and genocide scholar Amos Goldberg stated:

> What is happening in Gaza is genocide due to the fact that the level and pace of indiscriminate killing, destruction, mass deportations, displacement, starvation, executions, the elimination of cultural and religious institutions, the crushing of elites (including the killing of journalists), and the sweeping dehumanization of the Palestinians – create an overall picture of genocide, of a deliberate and conscious crushing of the Palestinian existence in Gaza … Jewish history will henceforth be stained with the mark of Cain, the 'crime of crimes,' which cannot be erased from its forehead. (Goldberg 2024a, 2024b)

And latest, in August 2025, the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) released a statement declaring "that Israel's policies and actions in Gaza meet the legal definition of genocide in Article II of the United Nations Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948)" (IAGS 2025).

2 Genocide Vis-à-Vis the Annihilation of Amalek

This paper seeks to *single out* the rhetoric of Amalek – invoked by Netanyahu and echoed in various official statements and popular cultural expressions cited above – and to place it under the analytical lens of *political theology*.

To be sure, the rhetoric of Amalek is not just rhetoric. As Atalia Omer puts it: "the mainstreaming of Amalek discourse is not *just* rhetorical but an expression of Zionism's foundational 'transfer' imagination and biblicalism." (Omer 2025, 11) And as described earlier, there is a widely shared understanding of the Amalek rhetoric as a mere incitement to genocide, reinforced by its resonance with established Jewish religious traditions. This interpretation has been *employed* not only by human rights NGOs and UN institutions – including the ICJ – but also by leading genocide

scholars and historians. According to this reading, the Amalek motif does not literally signify the destruction of the biblical Amalek but rather functions as a figure for annihilation itself, now *conceptualized* and legally classified in accordance with the category of genocide. In this sense, the Amalek rhetorics is, legally and scientifically, employed to serve the *only and ultimate purpose* of being one more evidence to measure, examine and/prove that a genocide is taking place in Gaza after October 7, 2023.

In no way, do I deny the *reasonability* of the venue that orders the widespread Israeli Amalek rhetorics under the concept of genocide. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that the genocide rhetoric is (now) the *only* vehicle that can practically assist the Palestinians through their long and painful pursuit of international legal *justice*. From the perspective of 'international legitimacy'– the only framework that enables Palestinians to discursively articulate their claims within global legal and institutional arenas – the genocide framework is indispensable.

By contrast, stripped of its subordination to genocide, the rhetoric of Amalek has little traction within international law and appears meaningless and unapplicable as it stands on its own. This is true from the viewpoint of the discourse of 'International Legitimacy,' I mean the only legitimacy that allows the Palestinians to *speak out*, and communicate, their voice on the legal and institutional international arena. *Within this arena*, the concept of genocide is necessary and meaningful, while the rhetoric of the annihilation of Amalek remains, by itself, utterly superfluous and meaningless.

Yet we must ask: should our understanding of the use of the Amalek motif in the Gaza genocide *end here*? Should its function be reduced solely to supporting the identification and prosecution of genocide, whether as concept or practice?

This paper proposes an alternative (additional) significant intervention. It challenges the *exclusivity* of the prevailing interpretation, led by the concept of genocide, by suggesting that Israel's Gaza genocide can *also* be read as an annihilation war against Amalek.

The Amalek narrative is rooted in a biblical tradition and ostensibly refers to a specifically Jewish religious heritage distinct from the political sphere of Israel as a modern secular state. When juxtaposed with the modern concept of genocide, the Amalek motif has thus far been subsumed within the framework of international legal and ethical discourse. In this mode of usage, it is strategically mobilized to substantiate claims that genocide is underway in Gaza. This interpretive move, I argue, reflects the broader modern tendency to subordinate the religious to the rational, or theology to philosophy.

My intervention seeks to invert this hierarchy. Rather than treating the Amalek rhetoric as secondary to genocide, I propose foregrounding the Amalek motif within

a political-theological framework for interpreting the Gaza genocide. Such an inversion, I believe, illuminates an otherwise obscured dimension of Zionist political theology that remains invisible if the genocide paradigm alone dominates the discussion. In what follows, I will trace the genealogy of the biblical figure of Amalek in order to clarify its deep entanglement with the political theology of Zionism.

To do so, I will *first* offer an interpretation of the grounding biblical narrations of Amalek (Exodus 17:14, Deuteronomy 25:17–19 and 1 Samuel 15) to highlight its political-theological carriage. *Second*, I will offer an analysis introducing Amalek as the archetype of Carl Schmitt's concept of the enemy (*hostis*). *Third*, and before proceeding to the concluding sections of the paper, I will present a short genealogy of the Zionist abuse of the biblical heritage (see e.g. Omer 2025) that ends with the labelling of the Palestinian as Amalek.

3 Reading the Enemy (*Hostis*) out from Amalek in the Biblical Narrative

3.1 Exodus 17:14

In the Bible, the people of Amalek are first introduced as the eternal enemy of god and Israel in their initial confrontation (Exodus 17:8–16): "The Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). From this very moment, Amalek is also condemned to *total annihilation*: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven'." (Exodus 17:14)

Amalek is not merely one enemy among others; Amalek is a unique enemy – an enemy of Israel's god himself, and by extension, of the people of Israel as god's chosen people. This enmity establishes not only the designation of the Amalekites as an eternal foe destined for annihilation but also an extraordinary and paradoxical dialectic between remembrance ("Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered") and erasure ("I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven").

3.2 Deuteronomy 25:17–19

The same *unresolvable dialectic* between memory and forgetfulness reappears – this time even more forcefully – in the second biblical account of Israel's encounter with Amalek:

> 17 Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. 18 When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. 19 When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget! (Deuteronomy 25:17–19)

This passage intensifies the paradox. The command to remember Amalek is issued twice: once affirmatively at the beginning ("Remember what…") and once negatively at the conclusion "Do not forget"). At the same time, the annihilation of Amalek is articulated on two distinct levels. First, at the cultural or symbolic level: "blot out the *name* of Amalek" (emphasis is mine). Second, at the physical or existential level: "blot out … Amalek from under heaven." Thus, the tension remains unresolved. Even if one attempts to resolve the paradox by mapping memory onto the cultural/written sphere and forgetfulness onto the physical sphere, the contradiction persists. The rhetoric itself resists resolution, underscoring Amalek's construction as the eternal enemy.

3.3 1 Samuel 15

It is important to note that the biblical accounts in Exodus 17:14 and Deuteronomy 25:17–19 do not describe Amalek as 'evil,' radically evil, or otherwise. This suggests that, at least in these passages, the biblical text does not invoke a cosmological dualism of Good versus Evil – despite the eternal enmity it ascribes to Amalek. Rather, the attribution of hostility to Amalek is *self-referential*, characteristic of the biblical narrative as a whole. I use the term *self-referential* here, and in my following arguments, to explain that the biblical designations 'good' and 'evil' correspond in fact to 'we' and 'they' and not to some metaphysical or transcendental moral order governing the world. The reader should have noticed that this term barrows Nietzsche's general argumentation in *On the Genealogy of Morals* – that applies in fact, Feuerbach's idea of reflection on the question about the nature of piety in the *Euthyphro* dialogue. Nietzsche explains how the biblical text transforms the 'self-referential' into a moral language:

> I can really hear what they have been saying all along: 'We good men – we are the just' – what they desire they call, not retaliation, but 'the triumph of justice,' what they hate is not their enemy, no! they hate 'injustice,' they hate 'godlessness;' what they believe in and hope for is not the hope of revenge […] but the victory of God, of the just God, over the godless. (Nietzsche, I, 14; also see, for example, Matthew 25)

Thus, Amalek is cast as an enemy not because of some inherent metaphysical (moral) quality but because of the Amalekites' specific actions against god and his chosen people: their attack on the vulnerable among Israel during the wilderness

journey, that is, when they "attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God."

This same self-referential logic of 'we, the narrators, and our eternal enemy, Amalek' is reiterated – though in a more radicalized and inverted form – in 1 Samuel 15:

> One Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the Lord. 2 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. 3 Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." (1 Samuel 15:1–3)

King Saul is not commanded here to wage a moral war against Amalek. When translated into modern or philosophical terms, the commandment of annihilation appears unequivocally 'immoral.' Saul is instructed to carry out the physical eradication of Amalek, expressed in biblical language as "put[ting] to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." Such an act cannot be understood as 'moral' or 'good in itself' by modern standards. By the same token, it cannot be said that Amalek is evil, nor that Amalek became the eternal enemy of Israel because of inherent evil. In short, both 'good' and 'evil' are foreign to the biblical construction of enmity between Israel and Amalek.

Yet the narrative continues by emphasizing Saul's failure to carry out god's command of total annihilation. I want to emphasise that Saul's failure was not a moral failure. In other words, it is not a failure stemming from mercy – for example, sparing annihilation from helpless children – but from a decision to preserve the best and strongest, *while* destroying only the weakest and least valuable:

> 8 He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. 9 But Saul and the army *spared* Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs – everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed. (1 Samuel 15:8-9, emphasis is mine).[1]

In sum, as the development of the entire chapter of 1 Samuel 15 makes clear, Saul's failure as sovereign king does not lie in his inability to perform a deed that could be judged as good (or evil) *in itself*. Rather, his failure consists in his inability to obey the *command* of his god.

---

1 The word 'spared' used in this citation is a translation of the Hebrew word 'וַיְחֶמֶל'. However, in modern Hebrew, this word turned to carry a heavy moral meaning as its most usual meaning denotes having mercy.

It is worth reminding the reader at this point that my aim is not to argue that the Bible is immoral. In my view, that line of inquiry is both uninteresting and misleading – just as arguments that impose morality or philosophy onto the biblical text can also mislead us. My purpose, instead, is to redirect attention away from what this text is not about, and toward the question of how it is relevant to Zionist political theology as it unfolds today in Israel's Gaza genocide. The crux of the matter, then, is this: how can the biblical Amalek narrative – once stripped of the moral and philosophical prejudices (to use Nietzsche's language) that have been attached to it – illuminate our understanding of Zionism, the national ideology underpinning the very notion of the *sovereignty* of the modern Jewish state?

I fully agree with both Raef Zreik and Shaul Magid in their claim that 'evil' is not a useful analytical category to describe either Hamas or Israel, since evil is acting with no context, no justification, no reason other than the act itself (Magid 2025). However, I disagree with the path that Magid undertakes to support this (proper) claim. For Magid grounds his arguments on the Jewish tradition that views Amalek as evil, without applying to it the critical Socratic question: is a thing pious because the gods love it, or do the gods love it because it is pious? In other words, Magid does not apply the criticism necessary to question the self-referential logic on which the judgment 'Amalek is pure evil' rests. As a result, Magid goes on to suggest that "Amalek, as Kant might interpret it, has for whatever reason (we are not told) erased its freedom and thus is irredeemable." (Magid 2025)

In any case, the biblical narration of Israel's eternal enmity with Amalek *builds up toward* 1 Samuel 15, where this enmity takes on *ontological significance* for the very notion of kingship and sovereignty. First, the historical account in Exodus 17:14 becomes a divine command, incorporated into the law in Deuteronomy 25:17–19. Second, Deuteronomy 25:17–19 anticipates the precise *moment of sovereignty* described in 1 Samuel 15, as Deuteronomy 25:19 'predicts' Israel's establishment over its promised land: "When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you *in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance*, you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" (emphasis is mine).

The biblical text is very clear. In line with Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*, the moment suitable for the fulfilment of god's commandment to annihilate Amalek, reaches its decisive moment only after political sovereignty has been established in the promised land and all wars with (other) *timey* – i.e., not eternal – enemies have come to a satisfying settlement.

In 1 Samuel 15, Saul, as king, stands before the test of fulfilling this command, which in turn becomes the test of his sovereignty itself. The *failure* of Saul to annihilate Amalek does not render him immoral; rather, it makes him instead a *sinner* before *his own* god: a sinner of an irreversible sin that cannot be paid for with any

sacrifice, a sinner who pays for his sin with *nothing other than* losing his sovereignty as the king of Israel. Thus, he, the sovereign king, who fails to confront the people's eternal enemy, i.e., Amalek, with annihilation *exactly* as commanded by god, cannot repair his failure and must immediately forfeit the sovereignty that god had bestowed upon him:

> 10 Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: 11 "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." … 17 Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. 18 And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.' 19 Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?" 20 "But I did obey the Lord," Saul said. "I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. 21 The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal." 22 But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice … 26 But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel!" 27 As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. 28 Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbours – to one better than you". (1 Samuel 15: 10–27)

4 Amalek: The Archetype of the Schmittian Political Theological Enemy (*Hostis*)

In *The Concept of the Political* (1932), Carl Schmitt establishes the distinction between enemy and friend as the defining criterion of the political. For Schmitt, the 'enemy' is a *public enemy* (*hostis*), not a private foe (*inimicus*). It is an existential other: the one against whom a community might be willing to risk life-and-death conflict:

> The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy. … The enemy is not merely any competitor or just any partner of a conflict in general. He is also not the private adversary whom one hates. An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity. The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such a relationship. The enemy is *hostis*, not *inimicus*. (Schmitt 2007, 41–3)

The resemblance between Schmitt's notion of the public enemy and the biblical figure of Amalek – conceived as both a public and existential enemy threatening political sovereignty – is evident. However, there is only indirect evidence that

Amalek influenced Schmitt's thought or served as the foundation for his concept of the enemy. Schmitt's text is primarily philosophical. To support the distinction between *hostis* and *inimicus*, he draws on Plato's *Republic* and Roman law, and not on the Bible in general or Amalek in particular.

Despite this clear resemblance, I have not yet encountered any scholarly work that examines Amalek as an archetype of Schmitt's concept of the enemy. Nevertheless, the evidence stands on its own, and it is evident that this problem requires a separate study beyond the scope of the present paper. Before proceeding, however, it is worth noting that Schmitt's use of the Latin word *hostis* builds a bridge connecting his concept of the 'enemy' with both Plato's argument in the *Republic* and Roman law, and further, to the biblical Amalekites, whom David calls the "enemies of the Lord" (1 Samuel 30:26), that is, *hostis* in the Latin translation of the Bible: *"venit ergo David in Siceleg et misit dona de praeda senioribus Iuda proximis suis dicens accipite benedictionem de praeda hostium Domini."* (1 Samuel 30:26)

5 Identifying the Palestinian as Amalek out of the Sources of the Jewish Tradition

My argument so far explains how Amalek becomes the Archetype of the Schmittian public enemy (*hostis)* grounded in the political theology of Israel as a *modern secular state*. However, I have not yet explained the grounds on which it becomes possible for Israel, as the *Jewish State*, to designate the Palestinian as Amalek.

Above in Section 3, the biblical text presents Amalek as a distinct people or ethnic group. Yet while Samuel ultimately kills Agag, the narrative of Saul's failure to destroy him granted Amalek a long and multivalent afterlife in Jewish tradition. According to this tradition, the Amalekites continue to exist, however they do not exist anymore as the proper name of that ancient single, distinct biblical nation or ethnic group that used to live near the land of Canaan. Now, this tradition opens the door for multiple and varied ways to interpret and/or identify Amalek.

To start with, we first encounter this shift in the biblical text itself, namely in the book of Esther. Here, this book reframes the Amalek motif for diasporic Israel by genealogically identifying Haman with Agag and by casting Haman's genocidal plot as the recurrence of the Amalekite threat. This biblical text explicitly calls Haman an "Agagite" (Esther 3:1). Through this reference to Agag, the Amalekite king, Esther's story relocates the eternal enmity between Israel and Amalek in an imperial Persian context. This narrative reverses Saul's failure: where Saul spared Agag, Esther (and Mordecai) neutralizes the existential threat, where Haman and his sons are executed. This occasion, associating Haman with Amalek, braces up the annual Purim rites and the haftarah for Shabbat Zakhor linking liturgical memory to the

godly commandment to 'remember.' Thereby, the Amalek motif becomes an annual communal memory.

Later, in post-biblical Jewish literature, the memory of Amalek came to pose a theological and ethical problem, inviting allegorical, eschatological, and legal responses. This rich heritage is significant, but it is not directly relevant to the present discussion. I therefore turn instead to examine how Zionism appropriated the Amalekite tradition from Judaism, employing it in its settler-colonial project and ultimately enabling the identification of the Palestinian people as the descendants of the 'seed of Amalek.'

In *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, Yael Zerubavel demonstrates how Zionist settlers in Palestine, even before 1948, drew on ancient figures and images to construct a sense of continuity between the biblical past and modern statehood. According to Zerubavel, this rewriting of Jewish history – especially through the narratives of the defence of Masada, the Bar Kokhba revolt, and Tel Hai – was not merely the product of government policy but a broader cultural Zionist enterprise involving politicians, writers, and educators. Zerubavel demonstrates how, in each case, Israeli memory transforms events that ended in death and defeat into heroic myths and symbols of national revival. (Zerubavel 1995).

From this perspective, the Israeli recourse – across politics, the military, media, popular culture, and the broader public sphere – after October 7, 2023 to give the Palestinians, as an enemy (*hostis*), the name of Amalek should not come as a surprise. In a recent paper, Tamir Sorek (2025) traces the current 'evolution of genocidal imagination' in Israel as the interplay of three key factors: the settler-colonial context, sentiments of existential anxiety and the activation of a cultural-theological toolkit rooted in the Bible and the reinterpretation of Jewish religious texts.

Like Zerubavel, Sorek is aware of the fact that "[B]iblical imagination has been central to the mythmaking of Secular Zionism, and Secular Zionist intellectuals were the first to use Bible-based genocidal cues." However, I should note that Sorek, like other scholars in genocide studies, classifies the biblical genocidal narratives – secularized by Zionism – under the category of genocidal rhetoric. In other words, Sorek adopts the commonly accepted paradigm (whose limitations I critiqued in Section 2 above), which subsumes Zionist Amalek rhetoric under the broader concept of genocide. It follows, then, that Sorek does not single out the biblical narrative of Amalek but treats it as one among the many 'genocidal approaches' found in the Bible.

In any case, despite his identification of a number of what he calls 'genocidal approaches' in the Bible, his paper remains focused on the Amalekite motif within the history of the Zionist movement. This genealogy shows that, after Amalek was employed to describe the Nazis (and at times Germans more generally), the term

was subsequently applied to Arabs and Palestinians, beginning with the Revisionist response to the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939.

Later, in 1948, the "metaphor of Amalek was adopted by other political factions and moved toward the mainstream" (Sorek 2025, 8). What is particularly noteworthy in Sorek's findings is "that the association of Arabs with Amalek among Religious Zionists remained marginal in the 1970s." (13) Moreover, even "Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, a prominent leader of Religious Zionism and a central figure whose students founded Gush Emunim, explicitly rejected this association." Further, Sorek identifies a turning point during the Second Intifada: prior to this period, the comparison to Amalek could have functioned as a rhetorical device and was not necessarily genocidal. After 2000, however, "rabbis who invoked this comparison also derived operative lessons from it, expecting soldiers to act in accordance with religious law as interpreted by these rabbis" (Sorek 2025, 16).

6 Amalek: A Matter of Self-Referential Legitimation

6.1 Amalek as an Existential Threat within Self-Referential Legitimation

It is true, as Sorek notes, that 'sentiments of existential anxiety' tend to emerge in times of war, such as in 1948 or during the Second Intifada. However, it is worth looking more closely at the complex nature of the fear that overwhelms the sovereign, King Saul, in 1 Samuel 15. This is not a natural fear of an external enemy: nowhere is Saul, a brave fighter, portrayed as afraid of the Amalekites themselves. Instead, his fear is directed toward god. Saul becomes afraid only in the presence of god and his prophet, Samuel, and later attempts – in vain – to argue in feverish defence of his (erroneous) deeds. Although he ultimately repents and asks for forgiveness, it is too late, for he has failed to fulfil god's command to annihilate Amalek utterly and exactly as instructed.

The existential threat posed by Amalek is thus *internalized* within the divine command itself. The *existential threat* arising from god's decree does not concern mere physical life and death, but rather *political existence* alone.

Like Saul, Netanyahu evokes, through his incitement to annihilate the Palestinians, a fear to lose sovereignty. However, the critical fact remains that the fear inherent in the command to destroy Amalek – and in the Schmittian act of naming the enemy – is self-referential. It is a dynamic between the sovereign (and his

people) on one hand, and the sovereign's own god on the other: A moment where divine authority and sovereign power collapse into a single imperative.

Obviously, the self-referential nature of the political-theological naming of Amalek excludes all external reality. This act of naming is a transaction between Saul, after he has become a sovereign king in the promised land, and his own god. One could say this naming is self-referential to the same degree that the foundational ideas of the promised land and the chosen people are themselves self-referential. This very quality enables the Bible to be treated as a historical document, or, in Ariel Sharon's words: "The Land of Israel is the open Bible, the written testimony, the identity and right of the Jewish people." (Sharon 2005)

It is precisely at this point that external frameworks like international law and international legitimacy become meaningless and irrelevant. Indeed, from the perspective of this political-theological reading of Amalekite enmity, we are compelled to return to and reaffirm Schmitt's definition of the enemy as a public enemy (*hostis*): Amalek is the enemy of the people, not a personal enemy (*inimicus*) of any individual – unless that individual is the sovereign king, whose position inherently stands for god and god's chosen people.

6.2 Amalek: The Eternal Enemy of Zionism

Thus far, I have clarified how the *internal and self-referential* political-theological grounding of Israel as a modern secular(-ized) state surfaces through naming the Palestinians 'Amalek' – the eternal enemy of the people of Israel, whose annihilation is a divine command deemed necessary to preserve the political sovereignty of the Israeli state.

A decisive separation exists between Israel's political-theological enmity – manifested in the self-referential naming of the Palestinian as Amalek – and the logic of Evangelical-Israeli messianic Zionism. The figure of the Palestinian as Amalek, Israel's eternal enemy, emerges from the political-theological foundations of the secularized state (of Israel), which identifies in Amalek an existential threat to its sovereignty. In other words, the naming of Amalek is fundamentally detached from the messianic logic that governs right-wing Evangelical-Israeli Zionism. If it were driven by that messianic logic, it would be more appropriate to name the Palestinians Gog and Magog – the entity expected to appear at the end of days before the first coming of the Messiah (according to Jewish messianism) or the second (according to Christian messianism).

At the same time, the ontological foundation that links enmity toward Amalek with the sovereignty of the State of Israel exposes a direct continuity between the ethnic cleansing of al-Nakba in 1948 and the present genocide in Gaza. This continuity is reflected in Netanyahu's characterization of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza as

a "second War of Independence" (see, e.g., *The Guardian* 2023). In this way, both the current genocide and al-Nakba mirror the origins of the Zionist political-theological project in the nineteenth century, which described Palestine as 'a land without a people.' Once this description could no longer be sustained, it was transfigured from myth into prophecy, a prophecy demanding its fulfilment through human agency.

7 Amalek and Memory

The foregoing analysis traces the genealogy of Amalek as an enemy (*hostis*) within the political theology of Israel as a modern secular(ized) state. It may therefore be argued that Amalek is not merely the archetypal enemy but rather one among the many names of the enemy – one particularly suited to the adversary of Israel as a modern secular(ized) *Jewish state*. In this sense, Amalek functions as the specifically 'Israeli' name for the enemy. This reaffirms that Amalek/*hostis* represents the enemy of the modern secular state *as such*. The category thus enables us to extend the analysis beyond the boundaries of the Jewish State to encompass Western states – or what is termed 'civilization,' which, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has claimed, "Israel … is fighting to preserve" against "savagery" (Netanyahu 2023a, 2023b), that is, "civilization" that Chancellor Friedrich Merz suggested that it is spared the "dirty work" (*Drecksarbeit*) thanks to Israel (Merz 2025, para. 1).

This thread opens before us the possibility of reckoning with the nature of enmity toward the Palestinian from the perspective of 'civilization' as it has been shaped after WWII. More specifically, as I move toward this concluding point, I want to briefly highlight a hidden connection between German cultural memory – centered on the institutionalized, exclusive commemoration of the Holocaust – and the biblical command to annihilate Amalek, that is defined as an act of erasing memory: "Blot out the *memory* of Amalek" (emphasis is mine).

In this intervention, the gaze of a (Nietzschean) genealogy has unearthed the name of Amalek as the primal designation of *hostis*, revealing that the political-theological imperative grounding the present secular 'civilization' cannot be fulfilled through physical annihilation of Amalek alone. It requires the coupling of material destruction with the erasure of Amalek from the memory of 'civilization.' Thus, it can be argued that the Holocaust represents the German attempt to blot out the memory of the Jews – as Amalek/enemy/*hostis*. Later, after the collapse of the German imperial project at the end of WWII, a German culture of commemoration emerged, aimed at '*de-blotting*' the memory of the Jews.

From a postcolonial perspective, it is well established that the dogmatic exclusivity of this German commemorative cult arises from a Eurocentric vision of

'civilization.'[2] In this connection, the metaphor of Amalek adds to our understanding of the exclusive German commemorative dogma as an effort to blot out the memory of the 'new Amalek,' namely, the Palestinian. From this standpoint, it is misleading to interpret the ongoing campaign of European/German 'civilization' to silence the voice of the Palestinian merely as an attempt to alleviate the foreign disturbance this voice introduces into the Euro-German economy of emotions, which is governed by a cult of guilt. Rather, this campaign ought to be understood as following the logic of a double physical-cultural annihilation of the Palestinian.

8 Gaza: The Meeting Point of the Philistine and the Samson Option

This short exercise in Nietzschean genealogy cannot conclude without a brief explanation – perhaps a hypothesis – concerning the grounds upon which modern 'civilization' was so ready to embrace Netanyahu's binary ('civilization' versus 'savagery') as a genuine opposition, one that demanded a necessary 'Drecksarbeit.' I do not mean to invoke a meta-explanation such as the Orientalist paradigm, which can account for the emergence of such a binary in terms of the 'civilized West' set against the 'savage East.' My concern lies elsewhere: how, more specifically, *could* the Palestinians be inscribed in the memory of modern 'civilization' in such a way that, first, they become trapped within the circle of 'savagery,' *and* second, they emerge as 'savages' who must be expelled from that memory?

The answer, I suggest, is twofold. On the one hand, today's Palestinians inherit their very name from the Philistines, the ancient Gazans. On the other hand, the memory of modern 'civilization' drew from this name the figure of the Philister. In its original German usage, and later in its English derivation, the Philister – whose architype is Goliat – is a derogatory term: a label for the materialistic narrow-minded, materialistic person who is hostile to intellect, art, spirituality, and culture, or in short hostile to 'civilization.' (e.g. Oxford Reference).

The Philister thesis deserves broader and deeper contemplation than the limits of this paper allow. In the meantime, the eternal name of Amalek hangs above the severed heads of Palestinian children, while the ghost of Samson lingers as a looming possibility in the skies over Gaza. The story of Samson's death offers yet another metaphor that occupied my thoughts during the first weeks of Israel's genocidal war

2 The present Eurocentric memory views (universal) history before WWII as one moving towards the Holocaust that is made in turn an exclusive reference to post WWII history. It is worth to read under this light Dan Diner's *Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse: Über Geltung und Wirkung des Holocaust* (2007), where he takes on himself the task of countering post-colonial memories that challenge this Eurocentrism.

on Gaza. Samson sought vengeance against the people of Gaza: "7 Samson said to them, "Since you've acted like this, I swear that I won't stop until I get my revenge on you." (Judges 15:7). Yet, as has often been said, the desire for vengeance makes one blind. Tragically, Samson's thirst for revenge not only led to his blindness, but also to his death – as the first suicide bomber in Occidental history. However, in that (imagined) time, the gates of Gaza – once torn down by Samson (Judjes 16:3) – stood as guardians of the city. Today, Gaza's gates serve instead as the ultimate enclosure of the world's largest open-air prison. Might this explain Netanyahu's choice to quote the Amalek passage rather than the story of Samson? Might this allow the narrative to find its ending elsewhere?[3]

References

Amnesty International. 2024. *You Feel like you are Subhuman": Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza*. Amnesty International. December 2024. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/8668/2024/en/ (accessed September 12, 2025).

Bartov, Omer. 2025. "I'm a Genocide Scholar. I Know It When I See It." *The New York Times*, July 15, 2025. https://www.nytimes.com (accessed September 12, 2025).

B'Tselem. 2025. *Our Genocide*. July 2025. https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/202507_our_genocide_eng.pdf (accessed September 12, 2025).

Chord Center, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. 2025. *Survey on Israeli Public Attitudes Toward Gaza and Civilians*. Jerusalem: Hebrew University. https://mondoweiss.net/2025/07/poll-overwhelming-majority-of-jewish-israelis-share-genocidal-belief-there-are-no-innocent-people-in-gaza/ (accessed September 12, 2025).

Dawn. 2024. "Dead Nazi' to 'Sons of Amalek': How Israel Is Weaponising Music to Dehumanise Palestinians." *The Dawn*. February 15, 2024. https://images.dawn.com/news/1192364/dead-nazi-to-sons-of-amalek-how-israel-is-weaponising-music-to-dehumanize-palestinians (accessed September 12, 2025).

Diner, Dan. 2007. *Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse: Über Geltung und Wirkung des Holocaust*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Eliyahu, Amichai. 2023. "Statement Suggesting Nuclear Strikes on Gaza Among Israel's Strategic Options." *Media interview*. November 2023. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israeli-minister-says-dropping-nuclear-bomb-on-gaza-is-option-/3044272 (accessed September 12, 2025).

El País. 2024. "'Wipe Gaza off the Face of the Earth': The Statements Made by Israeli Politicians on Which South Africa Supports its Genocide Case." *El País English*, January 11, 2024. https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-01-11/wipe-gaza-off-the-face-of-the-earth-the-statements-made-by-israeli-politicians-on-which-south-africa-supports-its-genocide-case.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

3 I am deeply grateful to my friends, Oded Schechter, Somar Almir Mahmoud and Azar Dakwar, for their invaluable assistance, thoughtful remarks and insights on this paper's ideas, without which it could not have reached its final form. The content, however, remains solely my responsibility.

European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR). 2024. *Q & A on the Law and Recent Developments: The Ongoing Genocide in Gaza*. December 10, 2024. https://www.ecchr.eu/fileadmin/Q_As/ECCHR_Q_A__Gaza_and_Genocide_20241210.pdf (accessed September 12, 2025).

Gisha. 2025. "The Killing Must Stop." *Gisha — Legal Center for Freedom of Movement*. https://gisha.org/en/the-killing-must-stop.

Goldberg, Amos. 2024a. "כן, זה רצח עם [Yes, it is Genocide]." *Shicha Mekomit (online)*. https://www.mekomit.co.il/ps/134005/.

Goldberg, Amos. 2024b. "What is Happening in Gaza is a Genocide Because Gaza does Not Exist Anymore." *Le Monde*. October 29, 2024. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/10/29/amos-goldberg-what-is-happening-in-gaza-is-a-genocide-because-gaza-does-not-exist-anymore_6730881_23.html (accessed September 12, 2025).

Goldberg, Amos. 2025. "בחוקר ג'נוסייד, אני יודע לזהות אחד כשאני רואה אותו [As a Genocide Scholar, I Know One When I See It]." *שיחה מקומית — Mekomit* (accessed September 12, 2025).

Human Rights Watch. 2024. *Extermination and Acts of Genocide: Israel Deliberately Depriving Palestinians in Gaza of Water*. December 19, 2024. https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/12/19/extermination-and-acts-genocide/israel-deliberately-depriving-palestinians-gaza.

International Association of Genocide Scholars. 2025. *Resolution on the Situation in Gaza Recognising that the Policy and Actions of the Government of Israel Meet the Legal Definition of Genocide*. PDF report. International Association of Genocide Scholars. https://genocidescholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/IAGS-Resolution-on-Gaza-FINAL.pdf.

International Court of Justice. 2023. *Application Instituting Proceedings*. The Hague: International Court of Justice. December 28, 2023. https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20231228-app-01-00-en.pdf.

International Court of Justice. 2024. *South Africa V. Israel — Provisional Measures*. Order of 26 January 2024. The Hague: International Court of Justice. https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf.

Magid, Shaul. 2025. *Amalek, Hamas, and Kant: Thoughts on Evil in the Time of War*. Contending Modernities (Global Currents), University of Notre Dame. March 26, 2025).

Maimonides. *Mishneh Torah: Laws of Kings and Wars, 5:6*. Sefaria (accessed September 18, 2025).

Merz, Friedrich. 2025. Merz: Israel übernimmt für den Westen die 'Drecksarbeit'. *Zeit* [Online]. https://www.zeit.de/politik/2025-06/friedrich-merz-drecksarbeit-israel-iran-g7.

Netanyahu, Benjamin (@netanyahu). 2023a. "Israel Is Fighting to Preserve Civilization Against Savagery." *X (formerly Twitter)*. https://twitter.com/netanyahu/status/ (accessed September 12, 2025).

Netanyahu, Benjamin. 2023b. *Address on Ground Operation in Gaza*. Jerusalem: Speech, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 28, 2023. https://www.gov.il/en/pages/statement-by-pm-netanyahu-28-oct-2023 (accessed September 12, 2025).

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1989. *1887. On the Genealogy of Morals*. New York: Vintage Books. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale.

Omer, Atalia. 2025. "Turning Palestine into a *Terra Nullius*: on Amalek and 'Miracles'." *Journal of Genocide Research* (May): 1—22. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2025.2504737.

Oxford Reference. s.v. "Philistine." (accessed September 13, 2025).

Physicians for Human Rights Israel. 2025. *Genocide in Gaza*. July 2025.

Said, Edward W. 1999. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York: CUP.

Schabas, William. 2024. *A Strong Case that Israel's Response Constitutes the Crime of Genocide*. Interview by Julia Prosinger. Der Spiegel. November 29, 2024 https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/

interview-with-human-rights-expert-william-schabas-a-strong-case-that-israels-response-constitutes-the-crime-of-genocide-a-da7e4524-ab3b-40e4-b409-f8fca9c081b8.

Schmitt, Carl. 2007. *The Concept of the Political. Translated by George Schwab*, Expanded edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Originally published 1932.

Segal, Raz.. 2023. *A Textbook Case of Genocide*. Jewish Currents.

Sharon, Ariel. 2005. *Text of Ariel Sharon's Speech to the U.N. General Assembly*. Jewish Telegraphic Agency. September 16, 2005.

Sorek, Tamir. 2025. "Mainstreaming a Genocidal Imagination in Israeli Society: Settler-Colonialism, Settler Anxiety, and Biblical Cues." *Journal of Genocide Research* (February): 1—24. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2025.2456321.

The Guardian. 2023. "Netanyahu Declares 'A Second War of Independence' as Fears for Gazans Grow." *The Guardian* October 28, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/28/netanyahu-declares-a-second-war-of-independence-as-fears-for-gazans-grow.

UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. 2025. *Genocide as Colonial Erasure: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territory Occupied Since 1967. Report by Francesca Albanese*. United Nations, 2025.

Zerubavel, Yael. 1995. *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.